

DUNGEONS, DRAGONS, AND OPERA WORKSHOP:
AN EXPLORATION OF HOW THE INCORPORATION OF TABLETOP
GAMING CONCEPTS INTO THE OPERA STUDIO CAN ENHANCE STUDENT
ENJOYMENT, ENGAGEMENT, AND ÉLAN

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To my grandmother, Tula Stone, who warmly hosted her nerdy grandchildren that played Dungeons & Dragons in the back room of her Texas Hill Country home.

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Introduction

Little did I know that the hushed gaming invitation from a fellow tenor in my studio would lead to the creation of this curriculum 3 years later. At the time, the group was like a secret society of graduate singers that were closet gamers, and more scandalous yet, table-top gamers. It was widely acknowledged during our collective youths that nothing was nerdier than playing *Dungeons & Dragons*, with the exception of LARPing (live action role-playing). I didn't have the heart to point out that as opera students we were aiming for a life where we could LARP freely day in and day out.

What I came to discover as I met weekly with my colleagues for dinner and fantasy gaming was that something phenomenal was taking place. These players, two tenors, a baritone, one fellow mezzo, and an informatics professional, were passionately dedicated to the characters they had created. Every action they took and every word they said was carefully crafted to coincide with their avatar's nature. Our wizard, Montel le Beef, would enthusiastically declare his actions with a spectacular lateral lisp while our gnome Cleric, Rambert, was constantly landing us in the next bit of trouble by nosing further into the dark and dangerous dungeon. They were odd, mischievous, and beloved characters, and we would celebrate them to the point of having themed dinners like "Mrs. le Beef's Meat Pies." While all this might sound bit outlandish, I found it to be a glorious celebration of creativity, community, and resilience that would be magnificent to see in our academic performance environments.

The correlation between table-top gaming and opera performance dawned on me when we were given a personal development project for my advanced instrumental methods course. It was designed to encourage us to create new ways of teaching that will

help us and our future students find heightened success in the classroom. At that point in my studies I had become somewhat disenchanted with the classic combination of students silently scribbling notes for future regurgitation while listening to ponderous professorial lectures. This isn't to say that all of my collegiate experiences were this way, but enough had been so that before entering into the Music Education department at Indiana University I had difficulty conceiving of a different way. Particularly a different way that wasn't too juvenile to utilize in the collegiate classroom.

Through learning about different teaching methods for K-12 as well as experiencing Indiana University's summer Kodaly workshop, I came to understand that these playful activities aren't just enjoyable for children, but are remarkably fun for adults as well. Shortly after this realization, I stumbled upon a TED talk by Dr. Jane McGonigal titled "Gaming Can Make a Better World." In her lecture she expressed the powerful potential for good in the field of gaming, and how it can change lives and our world for the better by building social connection, powerful engagement, resilience, and empowerment.

The next time I met with my fellow singers to play *Pathfinder*, a descendent of the 1974 table-top legend *Dungeons & Dragons*, I reflected on her words. I noticed the positive sense of community and encouragement, a pride in mentorship, and the sharing of a cherished game that had played an important role in their childhoods and adult lives. I found my mind fiercely engaged by the complex rule structure and fast-paced action. More importantly, I was hyper-aware of the need and social expectation to display a confident sense of character. This powerfully stimulated my personal creativity as each new event inspired speculation and situational analysis. Together we battled seemingly

unbeatable foes within an inch of our characters' lives, growing with confidence and skill as we conquered. Every session became a new adventure, and we looked forward to each other's antics. Half of the fun was the hilarious dysfunctionality of our team's relationship.

Watching my colleagues nearly physically act out the fantastic spells they were casting or the martial arts moves their character was executing reminded me of something. It felt shockingly like working on an opera together. As we went through the journey of exploring the story together, we learned more about each other and our characters. We nurtured and helped each other along the way, and while we made mistakes, they were always met with supportive laughter and encouragement. Sometimes we had disagreements, but they were all for the collaborative good and for the authenticity and growth of the game. All of these things felt exactly like the greatest opera rehearsal and production experience I had ever encountered. By the end of the opera we had become a closely knit family, facilitating each other's growth and cheering each other on as we faced our unique challenges. It was a source of overwhelming joy when colleagues conquered the most difficult moment of their arias or ensembles. I constantly looked forward to rehearsal time as a chance to see my dear friends again. To collaborate on something far greater than ourselves and to share a beautiful message with our audience. When the opera ended, I felt certain that I had experienced a once in a lifetime event that would never return. Now, though, with the right tools and a positive disposition, we as educators have a remarkable opportunity to facilitate that kind of magical experience for our students. By borrowing the elements of table-top roleplaying that make it such an enjoyable game of social and creative collaboration, we can change the opera workshop classroom into a wholly safe and fun environment for our students to explore and cultivate

this incredible musical art form as well as their own voices.

Chapter I: Review of Related Literature

Gamification

Gam·i·fi·ca·tion – noun – \,gā-mə-fə-'kā-shən\: the process of adding games or game-like elements to something (as a task) so as to encourage participation.¹

While the term was coined within the last decade, the concept of incorporating game theory into our everyday lives outside of playtime has been a growing area of study. It is most commonly associated with business practice, but over recent decades it has made a remarkable step into the realm of education. As the popularity of gamer culture continues to spread like wildfire, it would be remiss of us as educators to ignore the trend of play as a powerful tool for engaging our students.

When the Entertainment Software Association released its annual sales, demographic, and usage data report for 2014 titled “Essential Facts about the Computer and Video Game Industry” it shared that:

- Fifty-nine percent of Americans are gamers with an average of 2 gamers per gaming household.
 - The average age of gamers is thirty-one.
 - Forty-eight percent of gamers are female.
- The number of gamers over fifty years of age has increased by thirty-two percent between 2012 and 2013.
- The popularity of social games has increased by fifty-five percent from 2012 to 2013²

¹ Merriam Webster: Gamification. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gamification> (accessed November 7, 2014).

² “Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry” (April 2014): 2-5,

They also present a compelling quote from Constance Steinkuehler Squire, professor of digital media and co-director of the Games+Learning+Society Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

“You create these communities around the game that do an incredible amount of intellectual work, and when they’re done with that work, they will leave the game and go on to another game that’s more challenging. Can you imagine if we had that kind of environment in our classrooms?”³

Dr. Steinkuehler Squire isn’t alone in thinking that education would benefit from the energy and creativity that gaming engenders. Dr. Sarah Smith-Robins, Senior Director of Emerging Technologies at Indiana University’s Kelley School of Business authored an article in the *Educause Review* titled “This Game Sucks: How to Improve the Gamification of Education.” After establishing what she considers the vital components of a game (a goal, obstacles, and collaboration or competition), she states plainly that if higher education is functioning as a ‘game’ using these features, it’s functioning poorly. She continues by asserting that some students enrolled in collegiate study are losing sight of the reason behind higher education. They are aiming to simply complete their degree for increased income following their collegiate experience rather than exploring college for the sake of intellectual growth. This implies that the goal of a college education is not necessarily clearly established for some of our student populous. Subsequently, when the goal is confused, the rules of the game are easily misunderstood as well. Smith-Robins argues that if students consider the goal of their college experience to expand their resume, then what is to stop them from choosing a strategy of simply passing their classes rather than properly absorbing the material?

http://www.theesa.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/ESA_EF_2014.pdf (Accessed November 30, 2014).

³ “Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry,” 8.

She suggests three ways of remedying the potentially poisonous academic misconceptions surrounding higher education.

- Provide clear goals, explaining how classroom and homework activities align with those goals, and verify student understanding of this information.
- Make grading and progress transparent to students. Provide consistent and regular feedback to help students determine their success and areas for growth throughout the semester
- Consider our personal game play experiences. What is it that engages us in play? Utilize this information to determine how our and our students' favorite games can facilitate progress in the course.

She concludes, “Gamification is about motivation and engagement. Making learning fun does not require huge investments in technology. Instead, focusing on the ways that entertainment technology engages us can result in methods that we can transfer to any learning situation.”⁴

Fulfilling a Basic Human Need

Dr. McGonigal proposes that one of the reasons we are turning to games is that they are able to fill a basic human need that reality does not. They provide us a sense of efficacy and power, reward us for our successes, and teach and engage us in ways that our current life patterns don't. Society has a habit of viewing game play as a waste of time or escapist activity. While this might be part of the equation, history suggests a

⁴ Sarah Smith-Robins, “This Game Sucks: How to Improve the Gamification of Education” *Educause Review* 46, no. 1 (February 2011): 58-59, <https://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ERM1117.pdf> (accessed November 15, 2014).

deeper motivation. Herodotus wrote of the Lydians who survived an 18 year famine through alternating gaming for one full day and eating the next. This tale, whether true or apocryphal, indicates the use of games as a method to distract from and ease the perceived burden of the starvation they were suffering. It was a method of survival. McGonigal suggests that we are currently using games in much the same way today, but instead of famine what we yearn for is satisfaction, connection, and meaning.⁵

In 1974 Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, an American psychologist, published his study *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety* in which he presents the concept of flow or “the satisfying, exhilarating feeling of creative accomplishment and heightened functioning.”⁶ Dr. Csíkszentmihályi had noted that the pattern of everyday life lacked flow, but activities that appeared to have substantial quantities of it were games and playful activities such as chess and dancing. The correlation between these flow activities was that they were all challenging while stating clear goals and rules, and had the opportunity for continued improvement. McGonigal considers the crowning note of this study to be that these activities are chosen by intrinsic motivation rather than external forces like money or fame. While engaging in activities like these we are “completely activated human beings”⁷

The game industry has noted the importance of the positive emotions and energy that arise from flow experiences, and as a result they are relentlessly dedicated to the study of human happiness. It should be noted that while we are energized by flow situations, we can become over exposed to it after a while. As a result, it is very

⁵Jane McGonigal, *Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 5-6.

⁶ McGonigal, *Reality is Broken*, 35.

⁷ McGonigal, *Reality is Broken*, 36.

important to balance these activities with the calm of daily life; otherwise gamers will begin to feel regret assigned to the time spent engaging in play.

McGonigal's research into positive psychology studies has led her to believe that intrinsic rewards fall into four distinct categories. The first is "Satisfying Work" which involves any activity that has clear goals, is immersive, and clearly displays results in response to efforts given. The second is experiencing success or being given the hope of success. The third is social connection, and the fourth is providing meaning and a sense of contribution and participation in a larger work. Her conclusion: that "self-motivated, self-rewarding activity really does make us happier."⁸

Satisfaction

Jane McGonigal is quick to point to the *World of Warcraft* massive multiplayer online role playing game or MMORPG in nearly every one of her chapters, and for excellent reason. For over a decade the game has thrived. So what is it about the *World of Warcraft* that makes players continue to come back year after year? One reason is that the work conducted in the game provides a superior sense of satisfaction and progress. Each quest giver provides a clear sense of what the goals are, tells you why they need you to do the task, and then gives you a clear sense of which direction you need to go and what you need to find in order to get the task done. This provides a sense of confidence for players, and lets them know that they have the potential to successfully complete the task and advance their journey.⁹

Engaging courses tend to be challenging, have clear syllabi, assignments, rubrics, goals, and well-explained, practical applications for their content. I found my music

⁸ McGonigal, *Reality is Broken*, 49-50.

⁹ McGonigal, *Reality is broken*, 55-57.

education studies incredibly interesting because each new class was an opportunity to grow my strengths as an instructor. That potential was established early on in the course as well as with each assignment, so there was no doubt in my mind that the activities conducted there would be enjoyable and functional. Conversely, I have taken a class where a syllabus was never properly presented, projects were discussed whimsically in regards to proper content and due dates, and class time itself was just a series of unstructured work sessions. While, as an art class, project development time is understandable, the professor offered little guidance throughout the semester in regard to what it was we were doing unless pressed by a student to do so. This lack of structure was overwhelmingly frustrating at times, and I could see similar stresses among my colleagues.

The same traits that differentiate between a superior and inferior course can make or break the success of a game. The recently released game *Sonic Boom: Rise of Lyric* has been horribly received due to its poor development, inconsistent rules and function, and unclear goals among other things.¹⁰ Poor structure in games will be rejected as quickly as poor structure in courses. Conversely, excellent games share something in common with excellent courses: passion for their development, clear rules and goals, understandable progress tracking, unquestionable motivations for actions, and clear results after the completion of the assignment. All of these items can be easily incorporated into our course curricula.

Social Connectivity

While some games are to be enjoyed on their own, the most popular trend is to

¹⁰ Don Sass. "Sonic Boo." *GameSpot* (November 14, 2014) <http://www.gamespot.com/reviews/sonic-boom-rise-of-lyric-review/1900-6415956> (Accessed February 12, 2015).

incorporate a heightened sense of social activity. Table-top role playing games would not have thrived without the potential for social connection, and have notoriously offered a social outlet for those who suffer from social anxiety and awkwardness. It provides a safe, structured social environment with clearly defined rules, and through shared experience develops a strong social connection.¹¹

This is exactly the kind of collaborative community we want to foster in the opera workshop classroom. We want to ensure that students feel safe to explore this powerful medium in an environment where they won't be harshly judged for attempting to stretch their limits. While it is impossible to prevent students from negatively judging one another, we can actively foster an environment that rewards encouragement and positively reinforces peer mentorship.

Naches, the Yiddish word for the feeling of pride we feel when we have successfully tutored another and seen their success, was recently explored in a study of over 1,000 gamers. It is considered a prosocial emotion and found to be the eighth most desirable emotion that those surveyed wished to experience while gaming. It is that thrill that drives so many of us to teach in the classroom, and it is what has made so many games an amazing collaborative experience. One of the most cherished memories of my childhood and honestly adulthood is being tutored by my elder brother on how to play a game we were experiencing together. He loved researching play techniques, and we both felt positive social reinforcement in response to the knowledge imparted and its resulting success.

That being said, musicians can be particularly protective about studio techniques

¹¹ McGonigal, *Reality is Broken*, 82.

and tools, and so cultivating a classroom environment that guides students through respectful and kind ways to share information is a significant subject for consideration.

Another important concept to incorporate in the classroom, particularly one where we risk so much and can easily feel ashamed of failure, is to encourage the idea of happy embarrassment. Gentle teasing is a common behavior among gamers, and curiously enough it frequently incurs positive feelings from the receiver of the behavior. Small provocations acknowledge trust between the players by exhibiting the willingness to display vulnerability, the ability to hurt, and the choice not to do so. By allowing teasing, we let others feel powerful and embrace simple shifts in social hierarchy. The research of Dacher Keltner indicates that when we are teased and then shown signs of reconciliation, we show through micro expression like quick smiles that we enjoy that teasing. Another similar behavior, which is an easy method for getting new students more comfortable in the voice studio, is the act of “lowering our status to strengthen our relationships by acting silly.”¹² This helps students know that if we are willing to risk embarrassment as professors, they are safe to do so themselves without ridicule.

Fun Failure

Perhaps the most disparate quality of games from education at present is the extremely negative association with failure. It is commonly said that nobody *likes* to fail, but actually that’s not completely true. Gamers enjoy failure. According to McGonigal, gamers spend 80 percent of their time failing, yet they keep returning for more. She references a study conducted by game researcher Nicole Lazzaro in the Finnish M.I.N.D. lab for supporting evidence. Findings from the state-of-the-art psychophysiology research

¹² McGonigal, *Reality is Broken*, 85.

center hypothesized that test subjects would exhibit heightened positive responses to earning high scores or moments of victory. While this was true, the researchers found that players showed the strongest positive response when they failed while playing an expertly designed game. “Excitement, joy, and interest shot through the roof...”¹³ Failure in the game was followed by immediate, and rather spectacular feedback which gave players both entertainment and a strong sense of the power they held in the game over what was taking place. Indicating that “the right kind of feedback is a reward.”¹⁴

Rogue-like games, games which randomly generate different scenarios to provide a unique and essentially unending game experience, thrive on this formula. It’s designed around player failure, and that’s what makes it fun. A beautiful example of this is the award winning indie game *Rogue Legacy*. You are a knight bound to conquer the castle for honor and glory and treasure! However when you first start out the game seems impossibly hard and your character dies almost instantly. This would be defeating, but they die rather spectacularly leaving you with parting words that guide you toward improvement, and then you move on to pick your next knight, a descendent of the first. This would be fine in and of itself, but each descendent seems to suffer from a different set of conditions that alter the rules of the game such as dyslexia which jumbles all text presented to the player, or obsessive compulsive disorder in which you get bonuses for clearing rooms by breaking everything in sight. The reward for failure is entertainment, guidance for improvement, and a renewed sense of autonomy as you choose how you want your game to be amusingly influenced.

Humorous failure is a bit more difficult to place in the classroom, particularly

¹³ McGonigal, *Reality is Broken*, 64-66.

¹⁴ McGonigal, *Reality is Broken*, 67.

since the current perception of failure in the realm of academia is shame, dishonor, and negative social reinforcement. Which, when considered, is a bit absurd seeing as we take a course in order learn more about a subject we aren't experts in. It is important to influence our students to view failure as a necessary stepping stone to growth and success rather than a tragedy because they didn't nail a concept or activity on the first try. While communicating a black and white view on failure does an unfortunately accurate job emulating the work environment's view on failure, we are also squandering one of the few precious chances our students have of learning through failure and embracing it as a vehicle for good.

Flow

In his 2004 TED talk, Mihály Csíkszentmihályi recounts his encounter with psychology and his studies on human happiness and fulfillment. After observing the devastation wrought by WWII in the lives of those around him, he began to explore what components lead to a happy life. After exploring philosophy and religion, he stumbled upon a lecture regarding post-war trauma by Carl Jung which inspired him to read further in the realm of psychology.

In his lecture Csíkszentmihályi referenced a survey in the United States that indicated a relatively high level of happiness for those earning few thousand dollars above the poverty line over the last several decades. That same study suggests that financial wealth above that does not indicate a greater contribution to overall happiness. This led him to search for what behaviors are commonly associated with true happiness, and as a result he has continued interviewing individuals regarding the subject for the past 30+ years. He and his students have studied world famous composers, artists, athletes, and more recently successful business owners.

The individuals interviewed frequently described experiencing an elevated state of perception that went above and beyond the mundane, entering into a state of ecstasy.

When we are fully engaged in an activity that challenges and fulfills us, we tend to be so focused on that event that we can lose track of our worries, time, feelings of hunger or thirst, or our surroundings. He explains:

“Now he says also that this is so intense an experience that it feels almost as if he didn't exist. And that sounds like a kind of a romantic exaggeration. But actually, our nervous system is incapable of processing more than about 110 bits of information per second. And in order to hear me and understand what I'm saying, you need to process about 60 bits per second. That's why you can't hear more than two people. You can't understand more than two people talking to you.”¹⁵

What he notes when individuals are in a state of flow are seven characteristics: Focus, ecstasy, inner clarity, knowing achievement is possible, serenity, timelessness, and intrinsic motivation. He indicates that an activity containing these seven traits is ‘worth doing for its own sake.’ These experiences are triggered by activities that are both highly challenging and rely on careful use of a developed skillset. This combination produces a difficult, yet possible task that pushes the boundaries of our perceived capabilities. Csíkszentmihályi continues his quest to determine how we might be able to incorporate a higher frequency of flow in our everyday lives.

It is with the goal of increasing the opportunity for students to reach a state of flow in the opera workshop classroom that I propose the incorporation of game theory therein. If a sufficiently challenging and engaging environment can be developed, we can help students to banish their anxieties about failure or judgment. As a result they will ideally

¹⁵ Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, TED.com, “Mihály Csíkszentmihályi: Flow, the secret to happiness” (February 2004), http://www.ted.com/talks/mihaly_csikszentmihalyi_on_flow#t-398733 (accessed January 3, 2014).

experience a heightened level of reality in which they know their own growth and success, as well as feel further fulfillment both intellectually and artistically.

Motivation and Gaming

In a study conducted by Hoffman and Nadelson (2009), 189 students who averaged five or more hours of gaming a week were provided with a self-assessment regarding their affective and cognitive states while engaging in play. From this pool, a 25 participant sub-group was selected for further analysis. The students for the study ranged from undergraduate to graduate students and were offered extra course credit in exchange for participation. It is interesting to note that the 75.3% female population of this study does not reflect the average gamer gender percentage surveys conducted by the Entertainment Software Association.

This study focused on the play of multi-level games which contain increasing difficulty levels as players progress. Participants were surveyed regarding their age, gender, race, major, number of math, science, and computer courses, and the type and regularity of games played. After this descriptive data was acquired, researchers provided participants with four multi-item scaled instruments to assess task and ego orientation, interest and engagement propensity, motivation and performance, and flow and engagement. Those subjects who reached the interview criteria after completing the four instruments were engaged in a 20-30 minute interview to delve deeper into why they chose to engage in gaming, the types of games they play, genre preference, and the nature of their motivation to play.

“Large percentages of individuals reported that gaming induced feelings of contentment, satisfaction, and accomplishment. Much of our survey data indicated that achieving task-related goals was an important objective, and outcome, of the process of video gaming. Survey results also corroborated the interview data, which indicated that

gaming was an opportunistic context to socialize, but also provided an occasion to achieve competence in a challenging, yet controllable and supportive environment.”¹⁶

Current Assessments of Gaming in the Classroom

In Young et al.’s article “Our Princess Is in Another Castle: A Review of Trends in Serious Gaming for Education,” they reviewed research looking for correlations between video games and classroom achievement, and organized the findings by subject matter. Highlighting Vygotsky’s theory that play allows children to think creatively and achieve goals they could not manage in real life, they suggest that perhaps games like *World of Warcraft* and *The Sims* are simply the adult version of the experience of playing ‘house’ as a child.

They acquired the sources for their trend review through a two-tier search. They then took the 275 results and narrowed them down into five subjects: math, linguistics, science, history, and physical education.

The results in mathematics revealed that despite many educators’ wariness of utilizing games in the classroom, they offered a potential 7-40% increase in standardized testing scores in both high-school and collegiate level mathematics. Findings regarding motivation in association with mathematics related games were mixed. The results of a study by Kebritchi in 2008 noted that while the test group in his study showed signs of skill improvement, they showed no notable increase in motivation above the control group which did not engage in game play.

¹⁶Bobby Hoffman and Louis Nadelson, "Motivational Engagement and Video Gaming: A Mixed Methods Study," *Educational Technology Research and Development* 58, no. 3 (June 2010): 245-270.

Results in the area of science were varied, showing inconsistencies in outcome monitoring, assessment outcomes, and activities being observed. The most positive data pertained to studies by Barab, Goldstone, Zuiker and Arici, which were centered on the 3-D avatar based game *Quest-Atlantis*. This educational game acts to emulate a classic questing roleplaying that provides the opportunity for “performance-based transfer tasks following interactions with the science-based subzones.”¹⁷ Students ranging from grade 6-8 displayed notably higher performances on relevant standardized tests than their peers who engaged in traditional textbook and lecture classes. Conversely, a study by Harris (2008) indicated that the MMO game *Web Earth Online*, which focused on ecology, had the opposite effect. This suggests that research into the type of game elements that incur academic improvement must be further explored.¹⁸

Regarding linguistics, there are several options for language learning by emersion through collaborations in MMORPGs¹⁹ like the *World of Warcraft*. Here teams can collaborate with players from other countries to raid dungeons, or choose to play the game on servers that communicate primarily in Italian, Russian, French, German, Spanish, or Portuguese.²⁰ A study by Kuppens (2008) reported that students from the Netherlands who engaged in media and games in English showed significant improvement in grammar when translating English to Dutch. Curiously, the same is not true when translating Dutch to English. Additionally, DeHaan and Kono conducted a study in 2008 which revealed that students observing play of a language learning game

¹⁷ Michael F. Young et al. "Our Princess Is in Another Castle: A Review of Trends in Serious Gaming for Education." *Review of Educational Research* 82, no. 1 (March 2012): 70.

¹⁸ Young et al., "Our Princess Is in Another Castle", 70-73.

¹⁹ MMORPGs – Massive Multi-player Online Role Playing Games

²⁰ "Localization" WoWWiki. Accessed December 10, 2014. <http://www.wowwiki.com/Localization>.

learned more than twice the vocabulary of the game players themselves. Young et al. consider that this might be the result of increased cognitive load on the part of the player. The positive correlation between gaming and language learning improvements lead the reviewers to consider what might lead to the increased reception of games in the forum of linguistics. After reflection, they determined that it could be related to classroom instruction styles which are typically used in the language classroom. Since language is inherently social and associated pedagogy tends to revolve around socially focused activities like dialogues, it is not a broad leap to the world of immersive language learning via social games.

In the realm of physical education, a study at the University of Cumbria in England found that elementary students who were asked to use exercise equipment while playing video games said that the association of active gameplay and movement using the equipment ‘reduced the boredom of the exercise’. Another study followed 19 male college students who played *Dance Dance Revolution* for thirty minutes while having their heart rates, oxygen consumption, respiration, total steps, and ratings of perceived exertion recorded. Of the 19 players, 12 were experienced players who engaged in the game at the highest level of play.

“...experienced players showed higher levels of intensity and energy expenditure compared to inexperienced players. Experienced players also met or exceeded the American College of Sports Medicine’s recommendations for moderate-intensity activity, whereas inexperienced players were able to achieve levels of only very light-intensity activity. These findings imply that as players continue playing and improve, they may experience higher daily levels of physical activity and fitness in the same amount of time.”²¹

As a result, the reviewers pose that exergames have the potential to attract

²¹ Young et al., “Our Princess Is in Another Castle”, 76.

students that might be wary of traditional physical education courses. There is insufficient evidence to support clear conclusions on the matter, but as new gaming technology in this field develops, the opportunities for further research into the subject grows as well.

Regarding history learning through games, there are opportunities available to explore different time periods and geography through games like *Civilization IV*, *Call of Duty*, and *Age of Empires*. Unfortunately, multiple studies noted no clear improvement in test scores when it came to the navigation of historical facts as a result of game play. For example, a study by Moshirnia and Israel (2010) used a modified version of *Civilization IV* with a group of 74 undergraduate students, and implemented a pre and post-test grouping of the gaming students and a group that engaged in only power-point lectures. They found no significant difference between these two groups in the realm of increased understanding, though evidence did suggest that the gaming group showed signs of longer retention. While studies in this area are limited as well, evidence would suggest that students have a tendency to bypass information given to them that isn't integral to the game play. As a result, developing games to truly inspire improvement in this area will need to focus on deeper integration of historical data into the play itself.²²

Why add game elements?

Aaron Dignan, management consultant and author of *Game Frame: Using Games as a Strategy for Success*, suggests that activities involving learned actions, a system of evaluation, and a timely feedback system can be turned into a behavioral game. Dignan defines a behavioral game as “A real world activity modified by a system of skills-based

²² Young et al., “Our Princess Is in Another Castle”, 76-80.

play.”²³ He proposes the use of 10 elements to develop a behavioral game which he has labeled the “game frame”. They consist of:

- An activity, the behavior we would like our players to engage in
- A “player profile” which is a description of the players and will ideally help to determine if the player is motivated by achievement, structure, enjoyment, freedom, acceptance, control, self-interest, or social interest
- Objectives, clear goals for the game
- Skills, specific abilities that are specifically in use during the game
- Resistance, a challenge or opposition
- Resources, the space and supplies needed for the game
- Actions, what players are able to do and when
- Feedback, a response to a player’s participation
- The Black Box, which Dignan defines as a rules engine which “contains all the information about the interplay between action and feedback (like a syllabus)
- Outcomes, or results. ²⁴

It requires no leap of faith to see the correlation between this set of ‘game features’ and that of a well-designed course. Every game theorist referenced above has also listed items that can be easily manipulated into course design. With the reinforcement of the statistics provided by the Entertainment Software Association, it is a highly logical step for us to take games and gaming theory into our own classrooms. If we wait for our students to abandon the game to come to us, we might be waiting forever.

²³ Aaron Dignan, *Game Frame: Using Games as a Strategy for Success* (New York: Free Press, 2011), 81-83, 87-110.

²⁴ Dignan, *Game Frame*, 87-96.

However, if we bring the game to them we might find both our students and ourselves more engaged in the process than ever before.

Why *Dungeons & Dragons*?

As the gamer population blooms, so do the opportunities for cultivating different gaming concepts in our curriculum. Many trends in gamification lean toward the incorporation of video games into the classroom, but when it comes to the fine arts, particularly performance, this isn't the most practical solution. This is where turning to table-top classics is a logical step. When observing the basic mechanics of Gygax and Arneson's revolutionary game, the correlation between a typical opera workshop experience and a campaign of *Dungeons & Dragons* becomes clear.

The game itself is run by a Dungeon Master who acts as the storyteller, guiding the adventurers or player characters on a fantastic journey to save the world or destroy it. In the studio, our Dungeon Master is our composer, librettist, director, and conductor who guide the adventurers, our young opera students, on the exciting journey of a scene or show. The world our student adventurers explore might be vastly reduced compared to the open-world potential of *Dungeons & Dragons*, but we can draw attention away from this reduced autonomy by teaching our students to take pride and excitement in the creation of their character sheet and their acting choices.

Character sheets in *Dungeons & Dragons*, as well as its table-top role playing game descendants, serve as written record of a player's avatar. Hours are spent cultivating the best character possible within the rules of the game, and every unique trait ascribed to it adds to the fun and authenticity of the adventure itself. As David Ewalt stated in his

book *Of Dice and Men*, “D&D²⁵ players invest a lot of time and emotion in their characters, so it’s not surprising that they want to protect them... I loved the process of character creation so much that I’d spend hours designing characters with no intention of using them.”²⁶

What more could we want than our students taking pride in creating a detailed, individualized take on a centuries old opera role?

It is not uncommon for young students to be reluctant to take control of a new role due to its long performance history, but by encouraging a sense of autonomy and enterprise over character development and analysis we can help provide a powerful motivator for our students. It is important to show them that just because they are exploring a character in a beloved and time-honored score doesn’t mean it can’t hold their own sense of individualistic spark.

I would be remiss to imply that character sheets have never been used in an opera workshop classroom or that they inherently negate individualism. I have personally encountered their recommended use before, and through their generalized nature they are open to creative choice. I would argue, however, that they frequently don’t encourage in-depth consideration of a character’s personality and talents, which are just as vital to building human connectivity with the audience as historical and situational understanding.

One of the most fulfilling parts of building a new *Pathfinder* or *Dungeons & Dragons* character is choosing what specializations and talents they have, dreaming up their background story in detail, speculating on their moral or amoral upbringing, and

²⁵ D&D – *Dungeons and Dragons*

²⁶David M. Ewalt, *Of Dice and Men: The Story of Dungeons & Dragons and the People Who Play It* (New York: Scribner, 2013), 75-80.

combining these items to create a unique, personalized adventurer through which the player gets to vicariously experience the story. All of this data is concisely stored on a sheet as either numerical values or clear labels.

This leads to my second concern with traditional character analysis sheets. They generally encourage the use of full paragraphs, which, while a lovely writing exercise, does not enhance quick information reference as efficiently as a *Dungeons & Dragons* character sheet. In the game, a player's sheet serves as a detailed, precise snap-shot of who their character is so players can quickly reference and make sound choices based on what was determined with careful calculation prior to play. Their personality, physical and mental traits, skills, equipment, and flaws are all listed within the span of one to two pages. This strategy for corralling character data can easily be modified to serve the purpose of guiding our students on a journey to understanding their character. By distilling the mass of data that is available about their role and placing it into an approachable medium, they can quickly access the necessary information to tackle a scene.

Table Top Gaming Manuals

Dungeons & Dragons 1st Edition

Gygax and Arneson's original conception of the tabletop role-playing game was an engaging guide to inventive, high-fantasy play that inspired the creation of countless successors.

In the game's original manifestation the adventure's guide is referenced as the Referee, renamed the Dungeon Master in subsequent editions. Referees are strongly urged to carefully graph out dungeon maps for their adventurers well before the game ever begins, penciling in hallways, doors, rooms, caverns, crawl spaces, monsters and treasure.

The goal of the referee is to develop a highly detailed world for the players to explore and adventure within. It is important to note, however, that players have the freedom to choose how they undertake their new quest, which makes the game a dynamic experience for both the referee and their players. This juxtaposition of order and free-will is highly similar to that of a director who grants his actors the freedom to explore the role and scene. The director provides the actors with the environment, the score, and a general feel for the scene, but allows the singers to act, interact, and react to one another and that which is around them. While opera dialog and actions are far more scripted than in a *Dungeons & Dragons* game, there is still so much remaining freedom of choice that no two performances of an opera will be the same, just as no dungeon will be explored in the same manner twice.

Characters are designed with six central abilities: Strength, which governs their prowess in battle, lifting large objects, and other events that might require feats of physical aptitude; Intelligence, the ability to quickly assess details of a situation; Wisdom, holding pre-existing knowledge; Constitution, a character's health; Dexterity, the ability to skillfully move, climb, or navigate difficult terrain; Charisma, the allure provided by a combination of the character's personality and appearance. These six terms could easily be used to describe individuals in our everyday lives. Some are clumsy, strong, awkward, or natural-born leaders. Opera characters are typically designed to represent aspects of human nature despite their regular distillation into stereotypes.

The last item of the *Dungeons & Dragons 1st Edition* text which is relevant to the opera workshop classroom is character alignment. Alignment pertains to a character's moral compass, and in the case of the world of 1st Edition *Dungeons & Dragons* it has

only three subsets: Law, Neutrality, and Chaos. In the single volume edition referenced for this document, the definition of these terms is no more expanded upon than their name, but thankfully these terms have powerful implications on their own. In the opera workshop classroom, alignment can aid students in considering whether an action they might take is in line with the character's view of how they should live in and react to their world. For example, if Micaëla from *Carmen* is on stage, but not actively involved in the action, she might observe a bird in a tree rather than steal an apple from a nearby fruit cart, reflecting her pious, god-fearing nature.

The remainder of the game manual pertains to the rules of magic, battle and relevant items to the realm of high fantasy which extends beyond that which is necessary for the opera workshop classroom.²⁷

Pathfinder

Pathfinder is one of the many games conceived directly from Gygas and Arneson's creative work, based off of both D&D's original incarnation and the third edition of the game which was created by Monte Cook, Jonathan Tweet, Skip Williams, Richard Baker, and Peter Anderson. The nearly 600-page tome has expanded greatly upon the previously referenced 82 page document, and added more options for character development, skills, roles, and designing worlds.

In *Pathfinder*, characters have the same six primary character abilities of Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma. Now, however, characters have the ability to acquire skills which aid in rounding out the details of their nuanced

²⁷ Gary Gygas and Dave Arneson, *Dungeons & Dragons: Single Volume Edition* (Lake Geneva, Wisconsin: Tactical Studies Rules, 1974), 6-7, 11, 30, 68-74.

special abilities. Skills involve items like acrobatics, the ability to walk narrow ledges; diplomacy, the ability to convince others to your way of thinking; intimidate, the ability to bully others into doing what you want; and perform, the skill to play an instrument, dance, or sing. These important definitions aid in all manner of story-related actions such as a character's prowess at research, ability to speak languages, skill at riding a horse, or their ability to survive perilous situations. All of these skills are clearly marked on the player's character sheet so that with a glance they can recall that they have skills in singing, lock-picking, or horticulture.

Experience, the currency of advancement in the majority of role playing games, is handled slightly differently between *Pathfinder* and the original *Dungeons & Dragons*. While Gygax and Arneson indicated that XP (experience) should be rewarded after battles with monsters and the acquisition of treasure, *Pathfinder* states that experience comes not only from those events but also from challenges overcome and the completion of adventures. In opera workshop and the classroom at large, as challenges and adventures can easily be paralleled to assignments and performances. Experience then combines to show the player that they are gaining new abilities and skills as they learn and grow through their adventure, a parallel to the far more passive experience of knowledge and skill gained through collegiate education.

The *Pathfinder* core rulebook provides a more extensive guide to leading a gaming session. Here game masters are heavily encouraged to research, design, create, and gather all necessary elements and props to engage their players in the experience and to maintain a campaign journal to document the journey. The successful game master will take note of their player-character's history and incorporate that into side quests which can enhance

player immersion and further develop that player's character history and personality.

This text also offers guidance regarding how to design the world around the players, including door options, environmental conditions, weather, flora and fauna. This kind of quick reference index could be easily applied to the opera workshop classroom. Dilapidated wooden doors and walls overgrown with ivy can quickly become a relevant and immersive set when there is no set designer and time is of the essence. While it may not be practical for an opera workshop director to keep a *Pathfinder Core Rulebook* close at hand, there are potential benefits to building a concise list of environmental items that can help quickly establish an ambiance for both students and audience members.

An interesting section of this document provides instructions on how to create engaging non-player characters. The opera equivalent of non-player characters are the chorus; those who don't necessarily heavily influence the plot but build atmosphere and offer situationally relevant information. However, the term non-player character makes it sound as though they're not involved in the action and act only as background characters. In the case of a *Pathfinder* session, this is a common occurrence. NPC's as they are regularly called are vehicle characters played by the game master (this iteration's Dungeon Master) to facilitate progress in the plot. We never want members of our chorus to simply feel as though their role is unimportant and that they don't have the opportunity to be fully developed people. Therefore, this is one correlation to the opera workshop classroom I would not recommend making.²⁸

²⁸Jason Bulmahn, *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game: Core Rulebook* (Redmond, WA: Paizo Publishing, LLC, 2009), 15-17, 96-109, 166-167, 396-407, 448.

Exalted

Exalted is not dissimilar from the previously explored table-top role playing games, but its focus is clearly different. At the start of the text, before the publisher information or table of contents, the reader is presented with a story. It narrates a brief history of and the current state of the world, and introduces a single character struggling to resolve a frightening situation who comes into her mystical power.

This introduction immediately tells us that storytelling and character design are central to the game, making it an excellent vehicle for exploring creativity and character development in Opera. The world developed within *Exalted* has been designed in extensive detail. This makes character design far more complicated, yet also expands the options for character development.

In this game there are nine primary abilities, which the game calls Attributes: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina, Charisma, Manipulation, Appearance, Perception, Intelligence, and Wisdom. Interestingly, the authors appear to consider that items which are ‘skills’ in *Pathfinder* are far more central to decision making and action in the world of the game.

Skills in the world of *Exalted* are called abilities, and are primarily divided by cultural specialization. The war-like Dawn people have battle related skills, while the Eclipse are masters of Bureaucracy and the social graces. These skills are not necessarily tied solely to these cultures, and remain open to all player characters. There are many similarities between these listed abilities and *Pathfinder*’s, with the addition of some unique considerations such as larceny, socialize, presence, and occult. While opera is not always a forum for the mystical, occult as a character skill or knowledge specialization are

central to operas like *Die Zauberflote* and *Der Freischutz* where the occult and magical run rampant.

Unlike *Pathfinder*, *Exalted* requires you to choose backgrounds for your character. This feature is inherently built into the character sheet and is designed to aid the players and the Storyteller (Dungeon Master, Gamemaster or Referee) in navigating the adventure. These backgrounds include known allies or important affiliations like the backing of an organization or guild. Operatic examples might include Don Giovanni's servant, Leporello, or a mentor such as the Susanna to Barbarina in *Le nozze di Figaro*.²⁹ Awareness of these connections and associations are vital for the study of opera roles, and should be mandatory components of the character analysis process in opera workshop.

The characters developed within these games are so much more than their armor, magic, and spells, just as our opera roles are more than a man or woman singing words and moving across the stage. They are adventurers on a unique journey that is shared by both their cast and the audience in their midst. We must live our roles as actively as player characters live their quests.

1st Edition Dungeons & Dragons	Pathfinder	Exalted
Director – Referee	Director – Game Master	Director – Storyteller
Character Abilities	Character Abilities	Character Attributes
Detailed World Mapping	Detailed World Mapping	Detailed World Mapping
	Character Skills	Character Abilities
	Non-player character design	Non-player character design
		Heavier focus on drama and storytelling

Table 1: Gaming Rulebook Comparisons

²⁹Geoffrey Grabowski and Robert Hatch, *Exalted* (Stone Mountain, CA: White Wolf Publishing, 2001), 2-5, 96-149, 262-273.

Chapter II: Course Goals

Course Materials for Classroom, Instructor, and Students

The environment for the opera workshop course utilizing gamification will involve the designated university classroom in which the course is scheduled. It will require a table or tables large enough to accommodate the student course population as well as chairs that meet the same criteria. Prop storage locations will ideally be pre-established, but if the program is being built, negotiations must be made with the department for purchase or construction of sufficient storage cabinets. Appropriate props and set pieces will be determined per semester scene content, so advanced prediction of requirements cannot be made at this time, but storage and recycling of items is highly encouraged.

Instructor tools for teaching will be a binder containing the present semester syllabus and projected lesson plans, as well as 2 clean copies of the character analysis sheet. This will allow for students to borrow a copy with which to make copies, but ensure that the teacher is never without. On the first day of class it is also necessary to have the course enrollment plus two extra copies of the initial student survey and the character analysis sheet to accommodate potential late enrollments into the course. The final item for the faculty member to have is a single 20-sided die for the use in improvisational exercises. Students will need a binder or folder in which to keep their character sheet and any secondary handouts or instructions for course activities, 3 six-sided die and a die 20 of their choosing. All course documents should be uploaded to the university's online course management system so that students will always have access to important course information.

Concepts Covered

In this course students will be instructed on how to analyze, prepare, and explore an opera role, as well as acquire techniques for communicating with colleagues and audiences. They will learn and reflect upon multiple ways to gesture, how to research period costume, posture, and behavior, and explore techniques for responding creatively to unexpected performance situations. The goal is to create students who are comfortable studying new musical roles and have a broad set of techniques to rely upon so that they are confident when in professional performance situations.

Classroom Conduct Concerns

It is absolutely vital that a comfortable and open dialogue is maintained between the student and teacher. This is part of the necessary, regular feedback system that will allow students to evaluate and inquire about their progress or current assignment. Along this same line, close observation of student feedback behaviors is recommended to assist in assessing student understanding before moving ahead on a concept or exercise. Many current instructional techniques and social concerns prevent students from being comfortable admitting a lack of understanding, and so noting such behaviors and actively encouraging questions will be necessary.

Concepts will be first introduced in a round table discussion with visual aids, or, if the exercise requires it, student volunteers to set up an example scenario. After concepts are explained, a time will be opened for questions, and then the exercise will begin. Classes should start with a brief overview of what happened last time, led by students for bonus experience points and a specific achievement to encourage attendance and communication. Verbal check-in's will occur daily, and character sheets, forum

participation, written exercises, and performance reflections will be assigned and graded when appropriate.

Evaluative Measures and Proposed Assignments

Experience points (XP) and Achievements

Experience points are one of the oldest units of measure in role playing game history, and the name alone makes a remarkable amount of sense; just as in life, experiences add up to new skills and knowledge. By watching your avatar's experience points rise toward the next goal, you can clearly see that you are on the path toward being at least 20% cooler. Who doesn't want that?

All playfulness aside, this concept coincides with both Jane McGonigal and Sarah Smith-Robin's theory that changing the perspective on grading might offer students a more positive perspective on classroom feedback. The idea that we received a 95% on a paper or assignment implies that we were not succeeding on 5% of that assignment. The "you *almost* got it right" implied by this system isn't nearly as motivating as the systems games employ to positively indicate and reinforce your progress. Each time you complete a task, you gain a clear number of experience points. Every time you gain a certain amount of experience points, you level up which gives your character bonuses or titles as well as new skills. In fact, it functions almost exactly like real life, except we don't spend time giving ourselves credit for the hours of research we did on that paper, or the hour we spent in Microsoft Office to get the formatting on that document just right. In reality, all of those things give us life experience points that make us better at those individual tasks. If we gave ourselves credit for the everyday achievements we make, we would likely have a remarkably happier and healthier perspective on the way we influence ourselves

and the universe around us.

Another way that games facilitate our progress and participation is by setting up achievements. They respond much in the same way as leveling-up does, but they correspond with the completion of a specific task. One of my favorite examples of this is the “decidophobia” achievement in *Rogue Legacy* which rewards players for putting at least one level in every category making them a jack of all trades but master of none. This silly achievement encourages players to earn enough points to place into each of these categories, which introduces them to each of the features and will ultimately help them learn which ones they would like to focus on. While it is a circuitous journey, there is a mysterious joy in discovering and collecting all the achievements in a game.

In relation to this, I would highly encourage instructors to make achievements for engaging in behaviors that they feel are important to their course. “Opera Geek” could be an achievement for completing three character sheets. “Opera Nerd” and “Opera Turbo Nerd” could be future progressions as more sheets are produced. These achievements can be used as titles or badges displayed below their forum name in online course discussions. This will allow students to display their crowning achievements, and allow other classmates to identify colleagues with experience whom they can consult for guidance.

Character Sheet

The character sheet for this course will be designed from the most applicable traits of the *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Pathfinder*, and *Exalted* character sheet styles. The first section of the character sheet should not feel particularly unfamiliar to those who have studied a role before. Students will enter the character's full name, their name, the age of their character, and the height and weight of their character. While in many circumstances the character's approximate height and weight will be similar to the student's, there are instances such as *Falstaff* where keeping in mind a substantial weight increase will be important to creating a genuine performance experience. Eye color, while present, is largely significant if mentioned in a scene or score as a striking character trait. A commonly significant association is a character's religious preference, particularly in shows where religion plays a powerful part of the tale such as *Suor Angelica* or *Dialogues of the Carmelites*. If it can be determined, it is helpful to know the birth place of one's character. This can provide a variety of background details that would likely have influenced the character's youth and prior experiences. Also available for documentation is the approximate year the story is taking place, and the associated historical period. This will aid in determining logical costuming considerations, postural choices, and gestures. Next on the list is the character's profession, significant if they are known for their skill like the infamous Barber of Seville. The last item in this section is the character's primary objective, where the students will

CHARACTER:		
ACTOR NAME:		
AGE:	WEIGHT:	HEIGHT:
EYES:	HAIR:	
ALIGNMENT:		RELIGION:
BIRTHPLACE:		
LOCATION:		
YEAR:	HISTORICAL PERIOD:	
PROFESSION:		
PRIMARY OBJECTIVE:		

Figure 1: Basic Character Information

name what it is their character seeks most throughout the story.

Next to be considered are basic character abilities. To determine the numbers that will be attributed to each slot, students will roll 3 six-sided die and add the result. They will roll six sets and decide, based on the known information about their character, which trait they best belong to. Higher numbers indicate superiority in that ability. The abilities listed in figure 2 are defined as follows:

Strength: The physical strength of a character. An example character with a high strength score is Samson of Saint-Saën's *Samson et Dalilah* whose strength is central to

STRENGTH	
DEXTERITY	
INTELLIGENCE	
CONSTITUTION	
WISDOM	
CHARISMA	

his character and major plot points.

Dexterity: The agility or grace of a character.

Cherubino of Mozart's *Le nozze de Figaro* who walks into most scenes, causes physical havoc, and leaves would have a low dexterity score.

Figure 2: Character Abilities

Intelligence: Intellectual prowess, not to be confused with wisdom. An example of a character with a high intelligence score would be Jo from Mark Adamo's *Little Women* who, while lacking the wisdom of age, is able to navigate the world of authorship and find success in her field.

Constitution: The character's overall physical wellbeing. An example of a character with a low constitution would be Mimi from Puccini's *La Boheme*. In this case, and in most cases, a character with poor constitution who dies over the course of the show would have a progressively decreasing constitution per act.

Wisdom: A character's understanding of the ways of the world. An example of a character with exceptionally low wisdom would be Candide from Leonard Bernstein's

Candide whose lack of wisdom is the central driving force for the majority of his misadventures.

Charisma: The character's social prowess or magnetism. A character with incredibly high charisma would be Don Giovanni from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. It is his excessive charisma that creates his potential to wreak social and emotional havoc around him.

BLUFF	
CRAFT:	
CRAFT:	
DIPLOMACY	
INTIMIDATE	
KNOWLEDGE:	
KNOWLEDGE:	
PERFORM:	
PERFORM	
SENSE MOTIVE:	
SOCIALIZE:	

Figure 3: Character Skills

After determining their most notable basic skills, the time comes to evaluate a character's more specific talents. In figure 3 there are several items that require more detailed indication, they are identified as follows.

Bluff: the ability of a character to convince others to go along with their deception. Don Giovanni, our previous example, would have a very high bluff score when it comes to convincing his lovers that they are his one and only in the moment.

Craft: A characters ability to build or create specific items. An example would be Beth's creation of music in *Little Women*.

Diplomacy: A character's ability to take leadership of a situation or convince others of the merit of their ideas. *Figaro* is very diplomatic in his interactions with the Count, putting him in the good graces of his lord despite things not always going according to plan in the *Barber of Seville*.

Intimidate: A character's ability to make other character's submit to their will or cower in fear. The Queen of the Night in *Der Zauberflöte* is highly intimidating as she lectures Pamina to kill her father.

Knowledge: A character's specialized area of knowledge. An example of this would be Suor Angelica's knowledge of potions and herbalism. This is central to several plot events and is necessary to acknowledge accordingly.

Perform: A special talent or skill such as singing, dancing, or playing an instrument. A fine example would be Floria Tosca of Puccini's *Tosca* whose ability to sing is central to her identity.

Sense motive: The opposite of the bluff check, sense motive pertains to a character's ability to see through the machinations of others. A character with skill in this area would be The Old Lady in *Candide* who has done so much swindling in her lifetime that she can rarely be fully deceived herself.

The blank slots in this portion of the sheet are for the addition of talents outside of those mentioned. The nature of opera characters is incredibly diverse, and so this opportunity for students to determine their character's own special skills will encourage agency throughout the character development process.

On the character sheet there is also a small box to incorporate a character sketch. To promote creativity, I would recommend offering extra experience points for students willing to create a sketch of their character.

At the bottom of the character sheet, serving primarily as a quick reference, there is an inventory listing. This is where students may keep track of their costuming items and props so that there is always an easy list to reference for performance preparation.

GARMENTS	
HEAD:	
NECK:	
SHOULDERS:	
CHEST:	
WAIST:	
LEGS:	
FEET:	
RINGS:	
UNDERGARMENTS:	
OTHERS	

Figure 4: Character Costuming and Props

Scene Analysis

Students will be expected to critically dissect each scene they are assigned. To do this they will need to build a word-for-word translation of all of their and their colleague's dialogue for any scenes that are outside of the vernacular. Following this, they will need determine what plot points and or pertinent dialogue happened in the opera or musical prior to the scene's occurrence to offer sufficient background leading up to the scene itself. Students will then be encouraged to listen to a recording of the score, rather than watch a performance, in order to determine musical and emotional subtexts. They will be asked to write down their reflections as they do so in order to recall them for class discussion.

What moments do they enjoy? Are there moments they don't care for? Why?

Following the textual and broad musical analysis, students will consider their character's over-arching goal for the show, and for their specific scene, including each unique character interaction. While it is not necessarily a part of socialization that we consider, most interaction takes place with a certain goal in mind, be it a favor, confirmation of data or positive social reinforcement. Determining this goal will help

keep physical responses in line with the message that is being conveyed to the audience.

After the students have determined these items on their own, they will be encouraged to enter and discuss their findings with the other members of their scene in the classroom forums in order to gain a cohesive and diverse perspective on the scene's meaning. This forum discussion will also extend to a class wide round-table discussion during which groups will share their personal findings with the class. Listening to the findings of others will ideally foster new insights into their own scene analysis and encourage further sharing and inquiries.

Forum Discussion Participation and Content

Most online course management systems utilized by universities contain a forum or discussion thread feature which allows for documentable communications between students regarding a specific topic. Here students will have the opportunity to establish discussion threads within their scene group to consider interpretation, character background, and creative concerns. Instructors are actively encouraged to participate and give feedback regarding student commentary, and to help facilitate conversation between students. This communicative option also provides a common location for students to engage in dialogues outside of classroom time should they need to set up meetings or recreational practice time. It will also allow for the free exchange of ideas and hopefully encourage further creative collaboration amongst groups.

Specific forum topics may be chosen by the instructor such as Character Sheets, Scene Analysis and Questions, and Rehearsal Notes. The teacher can post rehearsal notes for the evening in an area where students can read and ask questions to confirm meaning if there is any confusion. Students should also be encouraged to start their own forum

topics if there are things they would like to discuss with their colleagues, and I would highly recommend building a forum in which students can offer praise for achievements or appreciation for the help of their colleagues.

A major concern for forums like these is that they stay positive and encouraging. It should be made perfectly clear that poor behavior in the forums will equate to an XP penalty for their grade in the course. Grievers or “player[s] in a multi-player video game who deliberately irritate or harass other players within the game using aspects of the game in unintended ways”³⁰ are not welcome in a classroom environment of positive exploration and experimentation, and ‘flaming’ or harassing ones colleagues is an unacceptable social behavior.

Improvisation Exercise

Within the improvisation exercise, students will get to explore acting as their character in situations outside of the range of the scene they have been assigned. The practical application of this exercise is to build a strong enough sense of character that if something unexpected should occur during the performance, the students will have the ability to respond in line with their character so as not to tip off the audience to any unexpected action. There are two levels to this exercise that can be used depending on the amount of time available within the semester. The first is a scenario designed by the course instructor involving a problem that the scene’s actors must solve together. It may contain a puzzle (situational or physical) and one to three win conditions. Winning is not necessary, but it will give the students more motivation to engage the activity if they know there is the potential to solve the puzzle. This early form of collaboration is

³⁰ Wikipedia: Griever. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Griever> (accessed November 13, 2014).

designed to occur while the students are still engaging in musical score study. This will help build their sense of character and encourage a sense of connection as a team early in the process through unusual and ideally humorous collaborations.

Written Improvisation Scenario

The second design for this exercise requires quite a bit more time. This involves the students coming up with their own scenario for their respective teams to resolve. This gives them creative agency and allows them to engage their colleagues in a unique and positive way. Each student will create their scenario, ideally something no longer than a paragraph or page, submit it to the instructor with the problem and win conditions, and then post the scenario lacking the win conditions to their team forum. This will allow their colleagues to have some time to speculate on how their character might engage that event given the time period they are from and the knowledge they possess. Then, over the course of one to two class days, the scenes teams will take turns attempting the puzzles as their characters. If there is a liberal amount of time to engage in the exercises, allow the students to observe each team as they attempt the puzzle and reflect upon what they saw and experienced. If class time is minimal, but the instructor would like to incorporate this creative approach, the teams can break up, move to separate corners of the classroom, and engage in the activities on a time rotation of 10 minutes: 3 to discuss the set-up and 7 to engage the scene. Once they have completed their rotation, they will be brought back to the class table and asked to discuss their findings and experiences.

The scenes themselves can come from nearly any genre, with the caveat that the characters from *La Boheme* might be at a total loss for how to progress on an alien spaceship. Perhaps there's a bomb on the train that must be defused. Maybe there's a

dead body in the room and the goal is to determine which character did it, even if none of them really did. Any event to get the characters interacting in an unexpected way that causes critical thinking, situational assessment, and responsive acting will hit the goal of the assignment. The more creative the better.

Acting Reflection

Students will be asked to review their favorite scene in a live action film or a recorded stage performance. They will choose an actor or actress to observe, and draw detailed conclusions about the acting choices they are viewing. The choice of scene will provide a sense of agency to the students, and give them an opportunity to associate strong acting choices with genres they enjoy. The reflection itself does not need to necessarily exceed the length of a double spaced, 12 point font typed page, but should offer insight into what was learned by the student watching the scene. Ideally this will inspire and fuel the student's own creativity as they study the choices of others and consider what decisions they might make on the stage themselves.

Final Scenes Performance

A final performance at the end of the semester is part of a typical opera workshop class progression, and for most intents and purposes is the course's final examination. Successful execution of the rehearsed and staged scene is a victory in and of itself, and students should be rewarded with experience points for the hard work and energy they have devoted to the evening's event. They should be graded upon energy, growth in relation to personal skill, interaction with colleagues, dedication to their character, and communication with the audience.

Performance Reflection – Group and Personal Assessment

Having students reflect upon their own performance is critical for building independent musicians. While they all expect their professors to offer feedback, taking into account one's own experience and feelings on a performance will help facilitate growth and help determine future areas of focus. In this case, students will be asked to make a two page assessment of the performance night. The first page will contain a description of their experience during the performance, including a minimum of five items that they would consider personal successes, and then a corresponding number of items they would like to improve on in the future. As artists we have a tendency to hyper-focus on items which we deem personal failures in a performance, so by having students acknowledge their successes first it will hopefully aid in balancing out their perspective on areas of improvement.

The second half of the exercise, a second page, will be a similar reflection on the activities of their cast as a whole. How was their collaborative experience? What things did their team execute exceptionally well? What were some things that didn't quite go as planned, and how did everyone respond? Was there a cast member who exceeded the student's expectations?

While the majority of these items, particularly any negative experiences might be kept between the student and the teacher, I would highly encourage instructors to urge students to offer praise to their colleagues that impressed or inspired them. Learning how to give praise is just as important as learning how to gracefully receive it, and encouraging students to positively reinforce their fellow actors will help to further foster a positive environment

Course Attendance and Participation

Most universities or departments will have an attendance policy in place, so it is important that any point system that is listed in association with attendance be in line with those pre-established guidelines. That said, offering experience points as a method of encouragement may seem juvenile, but attendance in a performance-based class is absolutely vital. On top of attendance, we absolutely want to encourage verbal participation in a class that focuses on musical communication, and so to encourage this, XP will also be given for actively participating in class activities and discussions. It is important to establish that students are not being forced to engage the course in a successful manner. It is important for them to understand their personal motivation for attending. If students are aware that the activities they're invited to participate in are going to aid them in advancing toward their personal goals, then their active engagement should be no trouble to encourage at all. As a result, a reasonable number of experience point will be given for the expected amount of course participation, but bonus experience points can be granted for exceptional course participation.

Responsive Course Syllabus

A responsive syllabus, one that has the potential for adjustment each semester, is highly important for a course like opera workshop. Each new class will yield a different crop of students with different experience levels and personal goals. It is vital to take these unique variables into consideration to keep students engaged and to make sure they are receiving the most out of class time.

Returning to the concept of flow, students must see sufficient challenge in an activity to want to remain engaged, but in line with that challenge there must be clear and

reasonably attainable goals that shift as progress is made. If we apply the same rules to a graduate and freshman level course, the graduate students would completely check-out of the experience. Few things are more frustrating in the collegiate environment than rehashing material and feeling as though time would be spent more productively doing just about anything else. I would speculate that this sort of response is what has led to so many students checking their email and playing on social media sites while in class. If they aren't being challenged or engaged, why would they need to pay attention?

As a method of combating this, I am proposing the use of a survey to be given to students at the beginning of each semester. This will involve gathering basic information like their name, year of study, and repertoire list, but just as importantly it will request a listing of their previous performance experience, goals for their time in the course, and a brief inquiry about their favorite way to study and learn, be it visually, aurally, or kinesthetically. From this we can cultivate a responsive course design that more effectively engages and addresses the needs of our students.

At the beginning of each semester, a standard course structure syllabus would be presented, but with the statement that it has the potential for adjustment based on what it is the students would like to study. They are still provided with structure so they understand the general expectations of the course, but are immediately given a sense of agency in the learning experience. This displays that at the start of the adventure together, we as faculty value their input rather than consider them passive participants in the experience.

It should be duly noted that adjustments to the syllabus should ideally be exclusively made at the beginning of the semester to maintain clear course goals. The

positive connection built by providing that sense of agency can quickly be undone if constant change indicates we're always changing the rules of the game. As soon as the structure becomes unclear, there is instant potential for students to disengage.

As we gain feedback from our students about what it is they would like to study, we can create a collection of lesson plans that can plug-and-play into our syllabus design. Each concept presented to us by a student will meet the need of several others, providing us with a collection of recyclable lesson plans that enhance our adaptability and responsiveness to student needs and expectations.

Chapter III: Assessment Plan

Course Grade will be determined by Experience Points, a set number of potential points which are earned per assignment. This cumulative effect will ideally boost feelings of achievement as they imply points earned rather than a percentage lacking.

Recommended experience attribution is as follows:

Character Sheet– ($xp / 3 = GPA$); example $300 xp / 3 = 100\%$

50 xp	Basic Character Information
20 xp	Determining of Base Stats
80 xp	Determining of Skills
50 xp	Inventory of Items
50 xp	Research of composer, historical context, garb, and gesture
50 xp	Research of character's in-show relationships
25 xp	Bonus xp for creating a character sketch

Scene Analysis – ($xp / 1.5 = GPA$); example $128 xp / 1.5 = 85\%$

10 xp	Discussion of scene environment
70 xp	Consideration of compositional elements like melodic contour, ostinato, and dynamic markings
40 xp	Dialogue and its textual and musical subtext
30 xp	Character's goals throughout the scene (will likely be multiple which vary upon specific character interactions)

Forum Participation and Content – ($xp / 3 = GPA$); example $270 xp / 3 = 90\%$

150 xp	10 xp per forum post (up to 15 posts); 2 xp bonus for each post beyond expected 15
150 xp	10 xp per paragraph (3+ sentences) of relevant content (up to 15 posts), bonus 5 xp for each post beyond expected 15
30 xp	5 xp per sentence of relevant content (up to 6)
60 xp	5 xp per each genuine encouragement of a colleague (up to 12), bonus 1 xp for each message of encouragement beyond 12

Improvisational Exercise - $(xp / 1.5 = GPA)$; example $128 xp / 1.5 = 85\%$

30 xp	Active participation in the exercise
60 xp	Dedication to character traits established in character sheet
60 xp	Responsive acting to groups actions
15 xp	Bonus xp for exceptionally creative situational response

Written Improvisational Scenario - $(xp / 1.5 = GPA)$; example $128 xp / 1.5 = 85\%$

120 xp	1 page, unique scenario containing clear setting, problem to solve, and available tools, must contain at least 3 conditions
20 xp	Posting to team forum (excluding win conditions) by 5 pm on the due date
10 xp	Adhering to listed formatting guidelines in digital document turned in to instructor
10 xp	Bonus XP for exceptional creativity

Acting Reflection – $(xp / 1.2 = GPA)$; example $105 xp / 1.2 = 87.5\%$

30 xp	Written synopsis of scene chosen for review, why it was chosen, and the actor observed (half page)
60 xp	Reflection on the experience being portrayed and a listing of ways the actor shares the experience with the audience and what those actions communication (3/4 to full page)
30 xp	A reflection on what actions the student might consider using themselves in similar acting situations and why they would be a benefit to their acting arsenal

Final Scenes Performance – $(xp / 2.5 = GPA)$; example $250 xp / 2.5 = 100\%$

10 xp	Timely arrival
30 xp	Preparedness - Costume, props, and musical/vocal
150 xp	Successful execution of the opera scene
70 xp	Considerate observation and support of other scene teams

Performance Reflection – $(xp / 1 = GPA)$; example $110 xp / 1 = 110\%$

50 xp	Personal assessment of personal and course goals reached in relation to student's performance
50 xp	Assessment of group's goals in relation to scene performance, mention of at least one personal success of each colleague involved in the scene.
10 xp	Bonus for pointing out a special success of a colleague at the final performance discussion

Attendance and Participation – $(xp / 4.5 = GPA)$; example $420 xp / 4.5 = 93\%$

<i>150 xp</i>	5 xp per class period attended* (participation credit must always adhere to university or departmental course attendance policy)
<i>300 xp</i>	10 xp per active class participation
<i>50 xp</i>	5 xp per each exceptional class participation (up to 10 times)

Chapter IV: Syllabus for Scenes Based Course

[University Name | Department Name]
Opera Workshop: Scenes and Shenanigans – [Semester]

Instructor Information:

[Instructor Name]
Office Hours:
Office Location:
Office Phone Number:
University Email:

Course Description:

The class will guide students through character analysis and study, as well as provide lasting methods for character reflection, collaboration, and broadening their acting technique portfolio.

Materials and Resources:

- Active University Email Account
- Access to the Course Site on [University's Course Management System]
- Recommended: 20-sided die for in-course exercises

Required Text/Readings:

- Articles to be posted on Course Site

Objectives:

Upon completing this course students will be able to...

1. Research and meaningfully analyze assigned roles
2. Keep an active and open perspective on scenes, characters, and environments
3. Learn the key components of successful collegial communication and collaboration
4. Develop a variety of acting techniques to respond to an assortment of acting scenarios
5. Explore movement that supports their current vocal and musical studies
6. Learn to analyze performances of themselves and their ensembles
7. Learn to offer constructive feedback at appropriate times

Assessment:

The max XP for assignments and percentage of course grade are as follows:

Assignment	XP	Grade Percentage
Character Sheet	300	15%
Scene Analysis	150	10%
Forum Participation and Content	300	10%
Improvisational Exercise	150	5%
Written Improvisational Scenario	150	10%
Acting Reflection	120	5%
Final Scenes Performance	250	25%
Performance Reflection	100	15%
Attendance and Participation	450	5%

Grading (in percentage): [Note that letter grade to percentage conversion can vary by institution]

A+ 97-100	B+ 87-89	C+ 77-79	D+ 67-69	F Below 60
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A	93-96	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	63-66
A-	90-92	B-	80-82	C-	70-72	D-	60-62

Assignments:

1. *Character Sheet:* In this assignment students will create a detailed and concise analysis of the role assigned to them over the course of the semester. They will complete both the quick reference sheet and a minimum of 2 pages of supporting research which will cover historical period, pertinent composer information, and special relationships with other characters within the show. [12 pt Times New Roman, double-spaced, 1 inch margins]
2. *Scene Analysis:* 2 page scene analysis regarding their character, perceived environment, compositional components, melodic and dynamic suggestion, dialogue meaning and subtext, and their character's goals throughout the course of the scenario. [12 pt Times New Roman, double-spaced, 1 inch margins]
3. *Forum Participation and Content:* Students will be expected to actively participate in course discussion forums with an expectation of:
 - a. 15 posts disbursed amongst any topics at 10 XP each – Total 150 XP
 - b. Of the posts previously mentioned, those consisting of a paragraph or more (3+ sentences) will earn an additional 10 XP (up to 15 posts) – Total 150 XP
 - c. Posts beyond the will earn a bonus of 5 XP (Up to 6 times)
 - d. Encouragement of a colleague will earn a bonus of 5 XP (Up to 12 times)
4. *Improvisational Exercise:* Students will participate in an improvisational exercise as their character with the scenario to be chosen by the instructor. Actors are expected to remain true to the character traits they have chosen for their role and act responsively with their colleagues.
5. *Written Improvisational Scenario:* Following the Improvisational Exercise, students will write their own unique scenario for their colleagues to explore as their characters. Setting must be clear and involve a problem to solve as their assigned role with at least 3 conditions for success. Students will be expected to post their scenario (without the win conditions) to their group forum by 5 pm on the due date. (1 page maximum) [12 pt Times New Roman, double-spaced, 1 inch margins]
6. *Acting Reflection:* Students will carefully observe and reflect upon one of their favorite scenes in cinema or on the stage, and focus on a single actor or actress. The analysis should fit within a single page and discuss acting choices made by the chosen artist and what feelings and impressions they convey to the observer. (1 page maximum) [12 pt Times New Roman, double-spaced, 1 inch margins]
7. *Final Scenes Performance:* Students are expected to arrive in a timely manner, be prepared, and in custody of any necessary costume items or props required by their scene. After successfully completing their performance, actors will carefully observe and support their colleagues involved in other scenes.
8. *Performance Reflection:* Following the final scenes performance, student will reflect on their performance, including a listing of 5 personal successes and areas where they would like to see growth in the future. The second half of the written assignment will be an analysis of their performance as a team including discussion of the collaborative experience, ensemble successes, unexpected events and the team's response to them, and indicating one or more teammates who gave an exceptionally good performance. [12 pt Times New Roman, double-spaced, 1 inch margins]
9. *Course Attendance and Participation:* Regular attendance and participation is expected and necessary in this performance-based course. As a result, any more than three un-excused absences will result in a letter grade drop and 5 or more will result in course failure.

[LOCATION FOR POLICYS REQUIRED BY DEPARTMENT OR UNIVERSITY]

Religious Observances, Disabilities, Academic Dishonesty, etc.

Course Calendar for Opera Workshop – Scenes and Shenanigans			
Week	Date	Topic	Assignment
1	Tuesday	Course Introduction; Syllabus Discussion; Character Sheet Introduction; Learning Styles Quiz	Repertoire List – Due Via Email by 5 pm
	Thursday	Roles Assigned; Character Sheet Discussion and Questions, Guided Sheet Creation	Forum Character Introductions
2	Tuesday	Discuss Scene Analysis Assignment; Example analysis; (Students Study Score)	Character Sheet Due
	Thursday	Questions regarding scene analysis or scenes themselves, break into groups to discuss scene (Students Study Scores)	Forum Scene Discussions
3	Tuesday	Discussion of improv. Exercise, Run improv. Exercise, Present improv. Scenario assignment	Scene Analysis Due
	Thursday	Discuss questions regarding the written improve. scenario assignment – Break into groups for dialogue rehearsal	
4	Tuesday	Musical Rehearsal	Written Improv.
	Thursday	Acting Exercise: improv. Exercise Rotation	
5	Tuesday	Musical Rehearsal	
	Thursday	Musical Rehearsal	
6	Tuesday	Discuss Acting refl.assignment; Musical Reh.	
	Thursday	Musical Rehearsal	
7	Tuesday	Scene Staging	Acting Reflection Due
	Thursday	Scene Staging	
8	Tuesday	Scene Staging	
	Thursday	Scene Staging	
9	Tuesday	Scene Staging	
	Thursday	Scene Staging	
10	Tuesday	Scene Staging	
	Thursday	Scene Staging	
11	Tuesday	Scenes Rehearsal	
	Thursday	Scenes Rehearsal	
12	Tuesday	Scenes Rehearsal	
	Thursday	Scenes Rehearsal	
13	Tuesday	Dress Rehearsal	
	Thursday	Dress Rehearsal	
14	Tuesday	Discuss Performance Reflection Assignment Final Scenes Performance (evening)	
	Thursday	Discussion of Performance Reflection	Performance Reflection

Chapter V: Syllabus for Show Based Course

[University Name and Department Name]
Opera Workshop: Collaborative Consortium – [Semester]

Instructor Information:

[Instructor Name]

Office Hours:

Office Location:

Office Phone Number:

University Email:

Course Description:

This class will guide students through character analysis and study, as well as provide lasting methods for character reflection, collaboration, and broadening their acting technique portfolio.

Materials and Resources:

- Active University Email Account
- Access to the Course Site on [University's Course Management System]
- Recommended: 20-sided die for in-course exercises

Required Text/Readings:

- Articles to be posted on Course Site

Objectives:

Upon completing this course students will be able to...

1. Research and meaningfully analyze assigned roles
2. Keep an active and open perspective on scenes, characters, and environments
3. Learn the key components of successful collegial communication and collaboration
4. Develop a variety of acting techniques to respond to an assortment of acting scenarios
5. Explore movement that supports their current vocal and musical studies
6. Learn to analyze performances of themselves and their ensembles
7. Learn to offer constructive feedback at appropriate times

Assessment:

The max XP for assignments and percentage of course grade are as follows:

Assignment	XP	Grade Percentage
Character Sheet	300	15%
Scene Analysis	150	10%
Forum Participation and Content	300	10%
Improvisational Exercise	150	5%
Written Improvisational Scenario	150	10%
Acting Reflection	120	5%
Final Scenes Performance	250	25%
Performance Reflection	100	15%
Attendance and Participation	450	5%

Grading (in percentage): [Note that letter grade to percentage conversion can vary by institution]

A+	97-100	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69	F	Below 60
A	93-96	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	63-66		
A-	90-92	B-	80-82	C-	70-72	D-	60-62		

Assignments:

1. *Character Sheet:* In this assignment students will create a detailed and concise analysis of the role assigned to them over the course of the semester. They will complete both the quick reference sheet and a minimum of 2 pages of supporting research which will cover historical period, pertinent composer information, and special relationships with other characters within the show. [12 pt Times New Roman, double-spaced, 1 inch margins]
2. *Opera Analysis:* 5 page Opera analysis regarding the show's history, the story's historical period, social implications, its perceived deeper meaning, and how the student's character is involved in supporting that message. Students should keep in mind compositional components, melodic and dynamic suggestion, dialogue meaning and subtext, and their character's goals throughout the course of the show. [12 pt Times New Roman, double-spaced, 1 inch margins]
3. *Forum Participation and Content:* Students will be expected to actively participate in course discussion forums with an expectation of:
 - a. 15 posts disbursed amongst any topics at 10 XP each – Total 150 XP
 - b. Of the posts previously mentioned, those consisting of a paragraph or more (3+ sentences) will earn an additional 10 XP (up to 15 posts) – Total 150 XP
 - c. Posts beyond the will earn a bonus of 5 XP (Up to 6 times)
 - d. Encouragement of a colleague will earn a bonus of 5 XP (Up to 12 times)
4. *Final Opera Performances:* Students are expected to arrive in a timely manner, be prepared and in custody of any necessary costume items or props required by the show.
5. *Performance Reflection:* Following the final opera performance, student will reflect on their personal performance, including a listing of 5 personal successes and areas where they would like to see growth in the future. The second half of the written assignment will be an analysis of their performance as an ensemble, including discussion of the collaborative experience, ensemble successes, unexpected events and the teams' response to them, and indicating one or more colleagues who gave an exceptionally good performance. [12 pt Times New Roman, double-spaced, 1 inch margins]
6. *Course Attendance and Participation:* Regular attendance and participation is expected and necessary in this performance-based course. As a result, any more than three un-excused absences will result in a letter grade drop and 5 or more will result in course failure.

[LOCATION FOR POLICYS REQUIRED BY DEPARTMENT OR UNIVERSITY]

Religious Observances, Disabilities, Academic Dishonesty, etc.

Class Schedule for Opera Workshop – Creative Consortium			
Week	Date	Topic	Assignment
1	Monday	Course Introduction; Syllabus Discussion; Character Sheet Introduction; Learning Styles Quiz	Repertoire List – Due Via Email by 5 pm
	Wednesday	Roles Assigned; Character Sheet Discussion and Questions, Guided Sheet Creation	Forum Character Introductions
	Friday	Discuss Show Analysis Assignment; Example analysis; (Students Study Score)	
2	Monday	Questions regarding scene analysis or scenes themselves, break into groups to discuss scene (Students Study Score)	Character Sheet Due
	Wednesday	Begin text reading with expression (Students Study Score)	Forum based Show Discussions
	Friday	Students continue with text reading (Students Study Score)	
3	Monday	Musical Rehearsal	Show Analysis Due
	Wednesday	Musical Rehearsal	
	Friday	Musical Rehearsal	
4	Monday	Musical Rehearsal	
	Wednesday	Musical Rehearsal	
	Friday	Musical Rehearsal	
5	Monday	Musical Rehearsal	
	Wednesday	Musical Rehearsal	
	Friday	Musical Rehearsal	
6	Monday	Scene Staging	
	Wednesday	Scene Staging	
	Friday	Scene Staging	
7	Monday	Scene Staging	
	Wednesday	Scene Staging	
	Friday	Scene Staging	
8	Monday	Scene Staging	
	Wednesday	Scene Staging	
	Friday	Scene Staging	
9	Monday	Scene Staging	
	Wednesday	Scene Staging	
	Monday	Scene Staging	

10	Monday	Scene Staging	
	Wednesday	Scenes Rehearsal	
	Friday	Scenes Rehearsal	
11	Monday	Scenes Rehearsal	
	Wednesday	Scenes Rehearsal	
	Friday	Scenes Rehearsal	
12	Monday	Scenes Rehearsal	
	Wednesday	Scenes Rehearsal	
	Friday	Dress Rehearsal	
13	Monday	Dress Rehearsal	
	Wednesday	Dress Rehearsal	
	Friday	Dress Rehearsal	
14	Monday	Discuss Performance Reflection Assignment	
	Wednesday	Final Scenes Performance (evening)	
	Friday	Discussion of Performance Reflection	Performance Reflection Due

Conclusion

Studies show that our society is increasingly turning to games as an outlet to fulfill the need for efficacy, social connection, and meaning. If we can bring these elements into our classrooms, we increase the probability of students reaching a state of flow which will provide them greater fulfillment as actors and as individuals. We must encourage failure as it translates into learning. We must teach them the joy of collaboration and collegial support. We must teach them how art can be made by playing and exploring this craft together, and that by risking happy embarrassment we can reach greatness.

In the opera workshop classroom, *Dungeons & Dragons* and its successors can provide us stepping stones to bringing play into the collegiate classroom. The integration of game theory can aid us in designing more engaging, enjoyable courses. That fun will translate into years of fond memories for the next generation of teachers and audience members. They will share the love they had of these times together with those they encounter in the future. As we build better classes, we help build an audience of opera lovers to keep the future of our art form alive.

Appendix 1: Lesson Plans

Character Analysis

Objective: Provide students with the character sheet format and guidelines for how to complete the assignment in order to facilitate better understanding of their opera role.

Materials: A clean copy of a character sheet, an example of a completed character sheet, a clear outline of expectations for the assignment, and two thirty-six packs of six-sided dice.

Pre-class preparation: Photo copy of character sheet, example character sheet, and guidelines (Number of students + 2 in case of late course enrollees)

1. Provide students with a copy of the character sheet, the example character sheet, the outline of expectations for the assignment, and pass the two containers of six-sided dice around the table, asking students to take three.

2. After explaining the example sheet and the outline of expectations in depth, ask if the students have any questions before beginning to roll their basic character statistics. Address all questions before moving on.

3. Ask students to roll their first score number, marking it down in pencil beside their stat box on their character sheet. Should any of the die-six they roll at this time show a 1, they should reroll for a higher number. They will repeat this process until they have six totals based on these roles. These numbers will remain unassigned until the students have completed their character analysis. The final step will be to take the information they have gathered about their character and use that to determine which number, higher being a better score in that ability, best suits their character in each ability.

4. Students should be permitted at least the length of the weekend to get their character sheet in order. It is recommended to have students email a digital version of their character sheet, either a scan or clear photo to the instructor so that they may have time to review and offer feedback as soon as possible.

5. After students have returned with their completed sheets, have them break off into their scenes groups and discuss their findings about their characters. Further discussion will help students clarify their thoughts through verbal communication, and ideally inspire more ideas for themselves and their colleagues.

Improvisational Exercise: Defuse the Bomb

Objective: Students explore through improvisatory exercise what collaboration might be in a high-stakes environment with their character and others in their scene.

Actors will be playing together and exploring situations and actions in a safe environment where new ideas and attempts at sharing them are welcome and encouraged.

Materials: A copy of each student's character sheet and ideally enough chairs to accommodate characters in the scene and a desk or different type of item to signify the driver/conductor's seat. If such props are unavailable, marking an outline of these items on the floor in electrical tape will also work to convey a sense of space.

Pre-Class Preparation: Design your improv scene using the materials listed above.

1. In a playful take on the movie *Speed*, gather students and tell them the situation they, as their characters, find themselves in.
2. They are now on a moving vehicle, at train, a carriage, a car, whatever is most appropriate for the time period in which they are from. The carriage driver is a madman who planted the bomb on the vehicle because he is in love with the ingénue, but she clearly has eyes for another. If the carriage goes below 7 miles per hour the bomb will explode. (Any speed appropriate to the relative vehicle will work.) If he can't have her, nobody can. The only way for the characters to survive is to collaborate, despite any pre-existing conflicts, to find and defuse the bomb. If they don't know what a bomb is, they suddenly have to negotiate with the driver (the instructor) to find out what it is and how they can possibly defuse it.
3. Recommend possible options for exploration: Do they try and convince the driver to give

up the design for the bomb so they can defuse it by encouraging his will to live? Does the ingénue try and convince him that she's in love with him to get him to stop all this madness? Do they collaborate to find the bomb, or are they unable to get past their differences, fail, and die horribly? That is for each team to decide, but it must be in the moment and true to the nature of their character. Do they only care for themselves and try to jump from the carriage? Is breaking a limb in their time period a death sentence due to infection? Is amputation worth jumping for when verbal negotiations might be possible? Or does the carriage driver seem too far gone to successfully convince against his terrible and mad plot.

4. The only real rule: Actors must declare their attempted actions before taking them so that the instructor may advise them of the results of their plan.
5. As students declare actions, the professor will look to their character sheet to see if it is within the realm of possibility for their characters or if they will require another's assistance to complete the task.
6. After all scenes have gone, have all actors reconvene and discuss the experience.
7. Extra excitement: Bonus XP to any willing to enact the scene in recitative style singing.

Win Conditions: 1. Bomb is under the conductor's seat. 2. Bomb is under the ingénue's seat. 3. Bomb doesn't exist and is all a ruse.

Improvisational Exercise: Zombie Invasion

Objective: Students explore through improvisatory exercise what collaboration might be like in a high-stakes environment with their character and others in their scene. Actors will be playing together and exploring situations and actions in a safe environment where new ideas and attempts at sharing them are welcome and encouraged.

Materials: A copy of each actor's character sheet, a map of each scene's set layout, and props or electrical tape to mark spaces on the floor.

Pre-Class Preparation: Recreate the environment each team will have to work in for their scene as best as possible.

1. The team is locked inside the setting of their scene, and outside are hordes of zombies. The characters aren't entirely sure what the creatures are, but they know they are extremely grotesque and everyone who has been bitten by one turns into one of the blasted things. As the zombies (perhaps actors in other scenes) claw at the doors to get toward our actors, they must prepare to defend themselves. Or panic. Whichever is more appropriate for their character.
2. Recommend possible options for exploration: Will they take the lead and gather arms while thinking of ways to barricade the doors to prevent the evil hoards from getting inside? If they do get in, will they push one of their compatriots in the way to become zombie food in order to facilitate their own escape? Would the hero sacrifice himself for the sake of his beloved?
3. To complete this exercise students must have a general understanding of what their environment would look like, imagine what kind of resources are available for offense or

defense in their time period, and pretend they are there for use. They must also know if the garb from their period will accommodate the necessary movements for escape or battle. Would the women of that time have any idea how to fight their impending doom, or would they be left solely in the hands of the men? If they do know, how did they acquire this knowledge?

4. The only real rule: Actors must declare their attempted actions before taking them so that the instructor may advise them of the results of their action.
5. As students declare actions, the professor will look to their character sheet to see if it is within the realm of possibility for their characters or if they will require another's assistance to complete the task.
6. After all scene groupings have gone, have all actors will reconvene and discuss the experience.
7. Extra excitement: Bonus XP to any willing to enact the scene in recitative style singing.

Win Conditions: 1. Sufficiently barricade the doors. 2. Are able to arm themselves with period items and enter a defensive stance to guard those in need of protection. 3. Fail and all perish at the hands of the amusing zombie hoards.

Improvisational Exercise: Situational Samba (2-4 Class Sessions)

Objective: To push boundaries of creativity and give students a deeper potential for understanding their characters by exploring how they might respond to a variety of situations.

Class 1:

Materials: Completed character sheets for all students.

Pre-Class Preparation: Print out of clear assignment guidelines for the Written Improvisation Assignment.

1. After completing one of the instructor guided improvisational exercises, provide students with the guidelines for writing their own scenario, and go over the details of the assignment expectations.
2. Students will be writing improvisational scenarios for themselves and their scene mates. Together they will encounter a problem that has at least 3 potential solutions.
3. After checking to confirm that there are no questions regarding the assignment, allow a weekend for the students to create and share their scenarios with both the instructor and their teams on the class forums. Encourage students to engage their classmates in conversation on the forums if they have questions about their characters or scenes.

Class session 2 – 4:

Materials: Completed character sheets for all students. Copy of all student created scenarios.

Pre-Class Preparation: Make as many props available for students as possible for the successful execution of their improv scenarios.

1. Once students have returned from their weekend and the professor has received and

reviewed their scene concepts, the class may proceed in two ways.

2. If the class size is reasonable and there is sufficient time in the semester, have each scene enacted one at a time so that the entire class may observe and reflect upon the experience. This method will likely require a number of class periods.
3. If the class is larger and time is of the essence, students may be broken up into scenes, and they can experience their improv scenarios in a 10-15 minute rotation. Once all groups have completed their scenes, have the students reconvene to share what they learned from the experience.

Appendix 2: Course Handouts

Survey to be Given of First Day of Class

[illegible]


[illegible]

Hear instructions and recite information aloud

Read instructions, write flashcards, view charts and graphs, color code information, avoid visual distractions.

Participate in movement-based activities, engage in hands-on activities, use flashcard walk the staging as it's taught to me.

Clean Character Sheet



CHARACTER:		
ACTOR NAME:		
AGE:	WEIGHT:	HEIGHT:
EYES:	HAIR:	
ALIGNMENT:		RELIGION:
BIRTHPLACE:		
LOCATION:		
YEAR:	HISTORICAL PERIOD:	
PROFESSION:		
PRIMARY OBJECTIVE:		

STRENGTH	
DEXTERITY	
INTELLIGENCE	
CONSTITUTION	
WISDOM	
CHARISMA	

BLUFF	
CRAFT:	
CRAFT:	
DIPLOMACY	
INTIMIDATE	
KNOWLEDGE:	
KNOWLEDGE:	
PERFORM:	
PERFORM	
SENSE MOTIVE:	
SOCIALIZE:	

CHARACTER SKETCH:

GARMENTS	
HEAD:	
NECK:	
SHOULDERS:	
CHEST:	
WAIST:	
LEGS:	
FEET:	
RINGS:	
UNDERGARMENTS:	
OTHERS	

Example Character Sheet



STRENGTH	10
DEXTERITY	14
INTELLIGENCE	13
CONSTITUTION	12
WISDOM	18
CHARISMA	13

CHARACTER:	<i>The Old Lady</i>		
ACTOR NAME:	<i>Ashley Stone</i>		
AGE:	<i>35</i>	WEIGHT:	<i>200</i>
		HEIGHT:	<i>5' 10"</i>
EYES:	<i>Brown</i>	HAIR:	<i>Black</i>
ALIGNMENT:	<i>Chaotic Good</i>	RELIGION:	<i>Agnostic</i>
BIRTHPLACE:	<i>Rouvo Gubernya, Eastern Poland</i>		
LOCATION:	<i>Buenos Aires</i>		
YEAR:	<i>1750</i>	HISTORICAL PERIOD:	<i>Classical</i>
PROFESSION:	<i>Whatever must be done to survive</i>		
PRIMARY OBJECTIVE:	<i>Ensure survival of herself, Candide and Cunegonde</i>		

BLUFF	<i>X</i>
CRAFT:	
CRAFT:	
DIPLOMACY	<i>X</i>
INTIMIDATE	
KNOWLEDGE:	
KNOWLEDGE:	
PERFORM:	
PERFORM	
SENSE MOTIVE:	<i>X</i>
SOCIALIZE:	<i>X</i>

CHARACTER SKETCH:

GARMENTS	
HEAD:	<i>Wig and Earrings</i>
NECK:	<i>Black Choker</i>
SHOULDERS:	<i>Shawl</i>
CHEST:	<i>Black Dress with Corset</i>
WAIST:	
LEGS:	<i>Tights</i>
FEET:	<i>Black Shoes</i>
RINGS:	
UNDERGARMENTS:	<i>Petticoat</i>
OTHERS	

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